

Cops are Good at Finding by [theamiableanachronism](#)

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Summary: This time, this universe, Hopper is the one to find a certain telekinetic girl in the Mirkwood Woods.

Cops are Good at Finding

Jim Hopper had handled missing kid cases before.

In a big city, you saw more of those than you'd ever want to. But he'd gotten used to it. You worked past the exhaustion, the racking of your brain, the worry over some kid who wasn't even yours. You handled it. You had to. Or it'd consume you.

He'd never thought he was that great with kids, and everybody believed him. He didn't exactly look the part: tall, imposing, just as ready to throw a punch as a wink. But when Sarah came along... Maybe he *could* be that guy. He was for a while, he thought. Each year that went by and every inch that she grew, the more he believed he was. The dad she needed. The dad she deserved. Turns out he wasn't.

And now she was just like those hundreds of other missing kids. Except he'd never find her.

He ran a hand over his eyes and squeezed them shut. The silence in the cab was deafening and it pounded painfully in his ears.

He'd called off the search party for the Byers kid. The forecast had called for rain and with the storm clouds overhead, it looked like it might be right for a change. Which left them with nothing but a bike with no rider. It had been hard enough seeing Joyce in his office this morning, and it was only going to be worse having to tell her that they hadn't found anything. That there was no news at all, good or bad.

"Find my son, Hop. Find him!"

She didn't need this. Joyce Byers, of all people, did not need this. He gripped the steering wheel. They'd have to try again tomorrow. He turned on the ignition and started to turn onto the road, thinking of the can of beer waiting alone on the middle shelf of his fridge and the mind-numbing company of the television when something caught his eye.

The engine thrummed impatiently as he scanned the trees with narrowed eyes. The woods, and nothing else, loomed out of the mist. There was nothing there, the exhausted part of him droned, begging him to turn the wheel back onto the road that led home where a bed was waiting. But a life led by gut instinct told him he couldn't risk leaving when there could be something.

His lips pressed together in a hard line, he flicked off the ignition and

pocketed the keys, stepping out of the car and turning on his flashlight all in one smooth motion.

For a while all he could hear were his own footsteps on the forest floor and the whispering of the mist around him. Then, with a sound like a cannon, a twig snapped just to his left. He wasn't as in shape as he had been twenty years ago, but the adrenaline rush was the same. His breathing came in painful bursts as he changed direction to follow the sound that as the minutes passed, he was becoming more and more convinced were the rustlings of a nervous squirrel.

Until he heard a gasp.

The hairs on the back of his neck stood up and his hand drifted to his holster as the cry was followed by what were definitely tentative footsteps.

Coming from behind him.

He spun on his heel and shined his light straight into a face.

It was a kid, a girl, frozen and staring up at him like a deer in the headlights of an eighteen-wheeler.

Some squirrel.

"Geez..." he hissed, letting out a breath he didn't know he'd been holding. "What the HELL are you doing out here?" he whispered. Her yellow t-shirt was one of Benny's, he'd recognize that logo anywhere. But it was all she was wearing. No shoes, no socks, nothing. And a head buzzed clean down to the scalp.

A brief unbidden memory of Sarah floated across his mind, but he shook it off and stretched out a hand. She flinched and turned to run, coming to an abrupt halt as he caught her arm.

"Hey hey hey! Settle down! Settle down!" She kicked and squirmed and twisted until he finally grabbed her other shoulder and bent down to look into her eyes. "I'm trying to help you! All right?" She jerked her arm, desperately trying to wrench it out of his grasp.

"HEY!"

The sternness in his tone must have struck some nerve because she immediately stopped struggling and looked up at him, breathing heavily through gritted teeth. He frowned. Hell, it was like she didn't want to go home...

Her eyes narrowed, either from confusion or suspicion, he couldn't tell, though he guessed it was probably a strong mix of both.

"Look," he said gruffly, slowly crouching down until he was at her eye level. "I'm not gonna hurt you. All we're gonna do is go down to the station, get somebody to come get you. All right?" He looked into her

eyes, searching for some sign that she wasn't going to keep fighting him. Slowly, the tension in her shoulders eased and she lowered her arm to her side. "Okay," he said with a curt nod, taking off his coat and cautiously wrapping it around her shivering shoulders. "Come on."

They made it back to the truck with his hand guiding her shoulder and soon he was back behind the wheel. His new passenger was drowning in his huge coat, looking tiny and fragile against the seat. She was furtively watching the world outside the window, as if she half expected somebody to come out of the misty darkness.

Hopper watched her for a moment and shook his head, confused. He mumbled an instruction to buckle up as he turned the key in the ignition. The roar of the engine was echoed in the clouds above, and slowly, they started off down the road.

Just as he was making a mental note to pay Benny a visit tomorrow to try and get some answers, his attention was drawn to three pinpricks of light coming toward him. They looked awfully like...

Bicycle lamps.

His eyes narrowed. Just beyond the glare of those lamps were three riders, distinctly kid-sized. For reasons he couldn't quite describe, he was fairly certain he knew exactly who those three kid-sized riders were. When they all suddenly screeched to a halt and one lisped out a curse, he knew for sure. With a calm foot on the accelerator, he caught up to and easily maneuvered around the bikes that had only gotten a few yards from where they'd stopped and turned on a dime.

As the screech of his tires on the asphalt faded away into the silence, he pocketed his keys and stepped out of the truck. He took his time, freezing the guilty parties to the spot with an icy glare.

The first drop of rain fell on his hand with a splash and he threw a glance up at the sky. Good call on the search party. Now for this one. Two measured steps and he was close enough to shine his flashlight into each of the kids' faces: Henderson on the left, Wheeler, and Sinclair, all squinting defiantly.

"Thought I told you kids to stay home."

Wheeler set his jaw and gripped his handlebars, sitting up a little taller in his seat.

"Will could be in danger."

Hopper bit back a bitter laugh and set his own jaw, his mouth a hard thin line. "So your plan is to go put yourselves in danger to find him?"

"He's our friend!" The Sinclair kid had squared his shoulders and was

glaring accusingly at Hopper. "That doesn't matter."

"It DOES matter," Hopper said tiredly. "I've already got one missing kid, I don't need three more." The rain was coming down harder now, falling in curtains from the brim of his hat, and the kids were all avoiding eye contact with him, looking furtively at one another instead.

"I'm going to be on the phone with your parents tonight."

If, at that moment, the earth itself had been split open by a bolt of lightning and they had all been staring down into a boiling river of lava, he didn't think any of them would look even half as scared as they did at the prospect of their parents finding out where they'd been.

The Henderson kid swore under his breath and the Wheeler kid looked ready to hit something. The Sinclair kid settled on searing Hopper with a glare.

Hopper turned off his flashlight. "Now get going. HOME, understand?" He waited to see each of them nod, reluctantly, defeated. Wheeler slowly brought his eyes up to meet Hopper's, but his focus quickly shifted to a point just over his shoulder.

"Who's that?"

A shaved head quickly ducked away from the window and back into the cab. Hopper looked back to Wheeler, who'd gotten his friends' attention in the time it took him to turn around, and now all three were squinting suspiciously from him to the cab and back again.

"Just a runaway." He fixed them with a glare that had quelled most adults. Turns out it wasn't enough to deter three twelve year olds.

"Where'd you find-"

"Go. Home. This is police business." He opened the door of the cab and stepped inside. "Don't make me tell you again." He slammed the door and glared through the window, waiting until they'd slowly turned their bikes around and started back in the direction they'd come, all the while throwing suspicious glances over their shoulders. Once they were far enough ahead, he turned the key in the ignition and shifted gears. He looked at the kid and she glanced guiltily up at him before ducking her head down to stare at the nervously clasped hands in her lap.

Just what he needed; two missing kids and way more questions than answers.

With a sigh, he set off down the rain-soaked road.